



Women in the New Deal

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vised labor legislation. President Roosevelt, encouraged by his wife Eleanor and seeking the support of women voters, also appointed two female diplomats and a female federal judge.

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In spite of these barriers, women continued their movement into the workplace. Although the overall percentage of women working for wages increased only slightly during the 1930s, the percentage of married women in the workplace grew from 11.7 percent in 1930 to 15.6 percent in 1940. In short, widespread criticism of working women did not halt the long-term trend of women working outside the home.



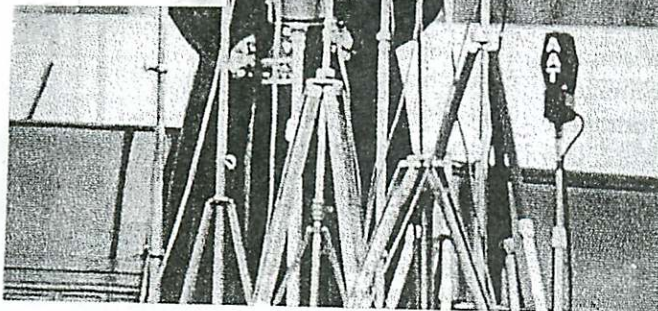
KEY PLAYER
FRANCES PERKINS
1882-1965

As a student at Mount Holyoke College, Frances Perkins attended lectures that introduced her to social reform efforts. Her initial work in the settlement house movement sparked her interest in pursuing the emerging social cor

AFRICAN AMERICANS TAKE LEADERSHIP ROLES During the New Deal, Roosevelt appointed more than 100 African Americans to key positions in the government. **Mary McLeod Bethune**—an educator who dedicated herself to promoting opportunities for young African Americans—was one such appointee. Hired by the president to head the Division of Negro Affairs of the National Youth Administration, Bethune worked to ensure that the NYA hired African-American administrators and provided job training and other benefits to minority students.

Bethune also helped organize a "Black Cabinet" of influential African Americans to advise the Roosevelt administration on racial issues. Among these figures were William H. Hastie and Robert C. Weaver, both appointees to Roosevelt's Department of Interior. Never before had so many African Americans had a voice in the White House. **A**

Eleanor Roosevelt played a key role in opening doors for African Americans in government. She was also instrumental in bringing about one of the most dramatic cultural events of the



▲
Marian Anderson sang from the steps of the Lincoln Memorial on April 9, 1939.

THE PRESIDENT FAILS TO SUPPORT CIVIL RIGHTS Despite efforts to promote racial equality, Roosevelt was never committed to full civil rights for African Americans. He was afraid of upsetting white Democratic voters in the South, an important segment of his supporters. He refused to approve a federal antilynching law and an end to the poll tax, two key goals of the civil rights movement. Further, a number of New Deal agencies clearly discriminated against African Americans, including the NRA, the CCC, and the TVA. These programs gave lower wages to African Americans and favored whites.

African Americans recognized the need to fight for their rights and to improve conditions in areas that the New Deal ignored. In 1934, they helped organize the Southern Tenant Farmers Union, which sought to protect the rights of tenant farmers and sharecroppers, both white and black. In the North, the union created tenants' groups and launched campaigns to increase job opportunities.

In general, however, African Americans supported the Roosevelt administration and the New Deal, generally seeing them as their best hope for the future. As one man recalled, "Roosevelt touched the temper of the black community. You did not look upon him as being white, black, blue or green. He was President Roosevelt." **B**

B
African Americans
in the New Deal

period: a performance by the African-American singer Marian Anderson in 1939. When the Daughters of the American Revolution chose not to allow Anderson to perform in their concert hall in Washington, D.C., because of her race, Eleanor Roosevelt resigned from the organization. She then arranged for Anderson to perform at the Lincoln Memorial on Easter Sunday. At the concert, Walter White, an official of the NAACP, noticed one girl in the crowd.

A PERSONAL VOICE WALTER WHITE

"Her hands were particularly noticeable as she thrust them forward and upward, trying desperately . . . to touch the singer. They were hands which despite their youth had known only the dreary work of manual labor. Tears streamed down the girl's dark face. Her hat was askew, but in her eyes flamed hope bordering on ecstasy. . . . If Marian Anderson could do it, the girl's eyes seemed to say, then I can, too."

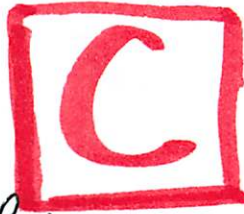
—A Man Called White

HISTORICAL SPOTLIGHT

DEPORTATION OF MEXICAN AMERICANS

Many Mexican Americans were long-time residents or citizens of the United States. Others came during the 1920s to work on farms in Texas, California, and Arizona. Valued for their low-cost labor during the good times, these migrant workers became the target of hostility during the Great Depression. Many returned to Mexico willingly, while others were deported by the United States government. During the 1930s, as many as 400,000 persons of Mexican descent, many of them U.S. citizens, were deported to Mexico.

Mexican-Americans & Native-Americans in the New Deal



Mexican-American Fortunes

Mexican Americans also tended to support the New Deal, even though they received even fewer benefits than African Americans did. Large numbers of Mexican Americans had come to the United States during the 1920s, settling mainly in the Southwest. Most found work laboring on farms, an occupation that was essentially unprotected by state and federal laws. During the Depression, farm wages fell to as little as nine cents an hour. Farm workers who tried to unionize

often met with violence from employers and government authorities. Although the CCC and WPA helped some Mexican Americans, these agencies also discriminated against them by disqualifying from their programs migrant workers who had no permanent address. ☹

Native Americans Gain Support

Native Americans received strong government support from the New Deal. In 1924, Native Americans had received full citizenship by law. In 1933, President Roosevelt appointed **John Collier** as commissioner of Indian affairs. Collier helped create the Indian Reorganization Act of 1934. This act was an extreme change in government policy. It moved away from assimilation and toward Native American autonomy. It also helped to restore some reservation lands to tribal ownership. The act mandated changes in three areas:

- *economic*—Native American lands would belong to an entire tribe. This provision strengthened Native American land claims by prohibiting the government from taking over unclaimed reservation lands and selling them to people other than Native Americans.
- *cultural*—The number of boarding schools for Native American children was reduced, and children could attend school on the reservations.
- *political*—Tribes were given permission to elect tribal councils to govern their reservations.

Some Native Americans who valued their tribal traditions hailed the act as an important step forward. Others who had become more "Americanized" as individual landowners under the previous Dawes Act objected, because they were tired of white people telling them what was good for them. ☹



▲ John Collier talks with Chief Richard, one of several Native American chiefs attending the Four Nation Celebration held at Niagara Falls, New York, in September 1934.

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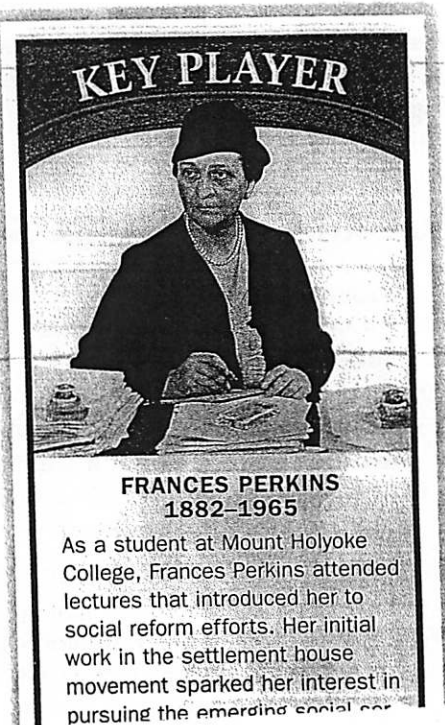
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The New Deal & the Expansion of the Federal Government

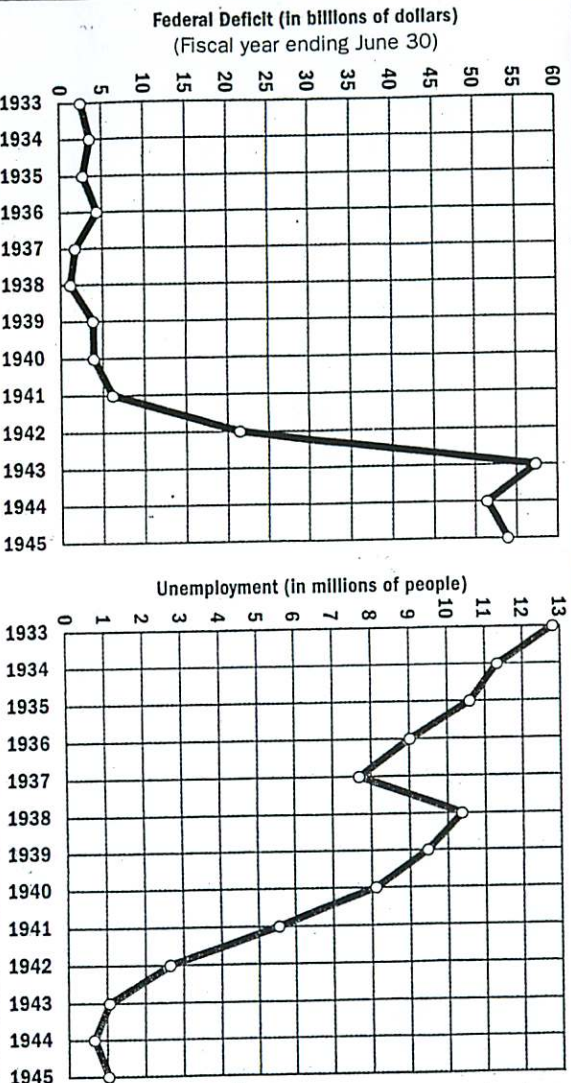
Social Security represented a dramatic departure from the traditional functions of government. The Second New Deal transformed the relationship between the federal government and American citizens. Throughout the 1930s, national political debate often revolved around the question of whether the federal government should intervene in the economy. After the New Deal, debate rested on *how* it should intervene. In addition, the government assumed a responsibility, which it has never wholly relinquished, for guaranteeing Americans a living wage and protecting them against economic and personal misfortune. "Laissez-faire is dead," wrote Walter Lippmann, "and the modern state has become responsible for the modern economy [and] the task of insuring . . . the standard of life for the people."

EXPANDING GOVERNMENT'S ROLE IN THE ECONOMY The Roosevelt administration expanded the power of the federal government, giving it—and particularly the president—a more active role in shaping the economy. It did this by infusing the nation's economy with millions of dollars, by creating federal jobs, by attempting to regulate supply and demand, and by increasing the government's active participation in settling labor and management disputes. The federal government also established agencies, such as the **Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation (FDIC)** and the **Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC)**, to regulate banking and investment activities. Although the New Deal did not end the Great Depression, it did help reduce the suffering of thousands of men, women, and children by providing them with jobs, food, and money. It also gave people hope and helped them to regain a sense of dignity.

The federal government had to go deeply into debt to provide jobs and aid to the American people. The federal deficit increased to \$2.9 billion in fiscal year 1934. As a result of the cutbacks in federal spending made in 1937–1938, the deficit dropped to \$100 million. But the next year it rose again, to \$2.9 billion. What really ended the Depression, however, was the massive amount of spending by the federal government for guns, tanks, ships, airplanes, and all the other equipment and supplies the country needed for the World War II effort. During the war, the deficit reached a high of about \$54.4 billion in 1944.

▲ Unemployed workers sit on a street in a 1936 photograph by Dorothea Lange.

Federal Deficit and Unemployment, 1933–1945



FDR Creates the New Deal Coalition

Although New Deal policies had mixed results for minorities, these groups generally backed President Roosevelt. In fact, one of FDR's great achievements was to create the **New Deal coalition**—an alignment of diverse groups dedicated to supporting the Democratic Party. The coalition included Southern whites, various urban groups, African Americans, and unionized industrial workers. As a result, Democrats dominated national politics throughout the 1930s and 1940s.

LABOR UNIONS FLOURISH As a result of the Wagner Act and other pro-labor legislation passed during the New Deal, union members enjoyed better working conditions and increased bargaining power. In their eyes, President Roosevelt was a "friend of labor." Labor unions donated money to Roosevelt's reelection campaigns, and union workers pledged their votes to him.

Between 1933 and 1941, union membership grew from less than 3 million to more than 10 million. Unionization especially affected coal miners and workers in mass-production industries, such as the automobile, rubber, and electrical industries. It was in these industries, too, that a struggle for dominance within the labor movement began to develop.

The American Federation of Labor (AFL) had traditionally been restricted to the craft unions, such as carpenters and electricians. Most of the AFL leaders opposed industrywide unions that represented all the workers in a given industry, such as automobile manufacturing. ^E

Frustrated by this position, several key labor leaders, including John L. Lewis of the United Mine Workers of America and David Dubinsky of the International Ladies Garment Workers, formed the Committee for Industrial Organization to organize industrial unions. The committee rapidly signed up unskilled and semi-skilled workers, and within two years it succeeded in gaining union recognition in the steel and automobile industries. In 1938, the Committee for Industrial Organization was expelled from the AFL and changed its name to the **Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO)**. This split lasted until 1955.

LABOR DISPUTES One of the main bargaining tactics of the labor movement in the 1930s was the sit-down strike. Instead of walking off their jobs, workers remained inside their plants, but they did not work. This prevented the factory owners from carrying on production with strikebreakers, or scabs. Some Americans disapproved of the sit-down strike, calling it a violation of private property. Nonetheless, it proved to be an effective bargaining tool.

Not all labor disputes in the 1930s were peaceful. Perhaps the most dramatic incident was the clash at the Republic Steel plant in Chicago on Memorial Day, 1937. Police attacked striking steelworkers outside the plant. One striker, an African-American man, recalled the experience.

A PERSONAL VOICE JESSE REESE

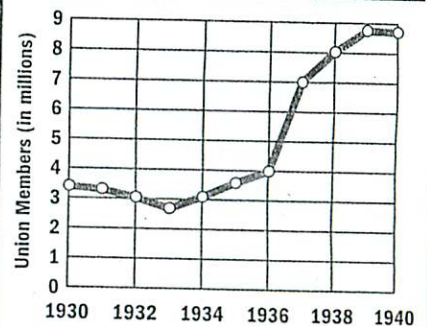
"I began to see people drop. There was a Mexican on my side, and he fell; and there was a black man on my side and he fell. Down I went. I crawled around in the grass and saw that people were getting beat. I'd never seen police beat women, not white women. I'd seen them beat black women, but this was the first time in my life I'd seen them beat white women—with sticks."

—quoted in *The Great Depression*

Ten people were killed and 84 wounded in this incident, which became known as the Memorial Day Massacre. Shortly afterward, the National Labor Relations Board stepped in and required the head of Republic Steel, Tom Girdler, to negotiate with the union. This and other actions helped labor gain strength during the 1930s.

Voters,
Labor
=
the
New
Deal

The Growth of Union Membership, 1930-1940



Source: Historical Statistics of the United States

F.D.R. & the Supreme Court

F



Fall In!, a cartoon commenting on Roosevelt's proposal to "pack" the Supreme Court, from the Richmond Times-Dispatch, January 8, 1937.

THE COURT FIGHT

Roosevelt's second inaugural address was the first to be delivered on January 20. In order to lessen a newly elected president's wait before taking office, the recently ratified Twentieth Amendment had moved inauguration day from March 4. FDR called on the nation to redouble its efforts to aid those "who have too little." The Depression, he admitted, had not been conquered: "I see one-third of a nation ill-housed, ill-clad, and ill-nourished." Emboldened by his electoral triumph, Roosevelt now made what many considered a serious political miscalculation. On the pretense that several members of the Supreme Court were too old to perform their functions, he proposed that the president be allowed to appoint a new justice for each one who remained on the Court past age seventy (an age six of the nine had already surpassed). FDR's aim, of course, was to change the balance of power on a Court that, he feared, might well invalidate Social Security, the Wagner Act, and other measures of the Second New Deal.

The plan aroused cries that the president was an aspiring dictator. Congress rejected it. But Roosevelt accomplished his underlying purpose. The Supreme Court, it is sometimes said, follows the election returns. Coming soon after Roosevelt's landslide victory of 1936, the threat of "court packing" inspired an astonishing about-face on the part of key justices. Beginning in March 1937, the Court suddenly revealed a new willingness to support economic regulation by both the federal government and the states. It upheld a minimum wage law of the state of Washington similar to the New York measure it had declared unconstitutional a year earlier. It turned aside challenges to Social Security and the Wagner Act. In subse-

quent cases, the Court affirmed federal power to regulate wages, hours, child labor, agricultural production, and numerous other aspects of economic life.

Announcing a new judicial definition of freedom, Chief Justice Charles Evans Hughes pointed out that the words "freedom of contract" did not appear in the Constitution. "Liberty," however, did, and this, Hughes continued, required "the protection of law against the evils which menace the health, safety, morals, and welfare of the people." The Court's new willingness to accept the New Deal marked a permanent change in judicial policy. Having declared dozens of economic laws unconstitutional in the decades leading up to 1937, the justices have rarely done so since.